

Message Text

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22

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 FEA-01

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8610

INFO AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY HELSINKI

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

AMCONSUL GOTEBORG

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, SW

SUBJECT: SWEDISH ELECTION DEVELOPMENTS

1. SUMMARY: WITH LESS THAN TWO WEEKS REMAINING BEFORE SWEDISH ELECTIONS, THE POLITICAL PARTIES ARE PRIMARILY GOING OVER OLD GROUND BUT ADDING SOME NEW TWISTS. MAJOR EVENTS OF THE PAST WEEK INCLUDE TELEVISED DEBATE BETWEEN THE "CANDIDATES FOR PRIME MINISTER," SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC LEADER PALME AND CENTER PARTY LEADER FALLDIN, AND ATTEMPTS BY SEVERAL PARTY LEADERS TO RESOLVE THE CONTROVERSIAL NUCLEAR ENERGY QUESTION BY PASSING THE BUCK TO THE ELECTORATE VIA REFERENDUM. FALLDIN HAS APPARENTLY SUCCEEDED IN MAKING NUCLEAR ENERGY THE MAJOR SUBSTANTIVE ISSUE IN THE FINAL WEEKS OF THE CAMPAIGN. END SUMMARY.

2. PRIME MINISTER PALME AND CHALLENGER FALLDIN MET FOR A TELEVISED "DUEL" SEPTEMBER 1 BEFORE A CROWD OF SOME 10,000 IN GOTEBORG. DEBATE CONSISTED LARGELY OF EXCHANGE OF QUESTIONS, WITH LITTLE REPLY. PALME POINTEDLY

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QUERIED FALLDIN ABOUT THE DIVISIONS AMONG THE OPPOSITION

PARTIES, AND THEIR LACK OF GOVERNMENT PROGRAM. FALLDIN
PERSISTENTLY ATTACKED PALME ON NUCLEAR ENERGY AND TRIED
TO FORCE A POSITION ON THE CONTROVERSIAL MEIDNER FUNDS.
PALME LIMITED HIS RESPONSE TO REPEATING THAT A DECISION
ON THE MEIDNER PROPOSAL WILL NOT BE TAKEN BEFORE 1979.
MOST OBSERVER'S RATED THE DEBATE A DRAW.

3. THE FOCUS OF CAMPAIGN DISCUSSION RECENTLY HAS BEEN
ON NUCLEAR ENERGY, WITH FALLDIN RELENTLESSLY PRESSING
THE ISSUE. IN REWARD, A RECENT PUBLIC OPINION POLL
REVEALED THAT VOTER OPPOSITION TO NUCLEAR ENERGY HAS
GROWN FROM 44 PERCENT IN MAY TO 48 PERCENT IN AUGUST, WITH 22
PERCENT UNDECIDED. FALLDIN STATED IN A TV INTERVIEW LAST WEEK
THAT IF THE NEW RIKSDAG CANNOT RESOLVE THE QUESTION,
HE IS WILLING TO ACCEPT A REFERENDUM. THIS WAS FOLLOWED
BY STATEMENTS FROM LIBERAL PARTY CHAIRMAN AHLMARK AND
MODERATE PARTY LEADER BOHMAN INDICATING THAT THEY COULD
ALSO ACCEPT A REFERENDUM ON NUCLEAR ENERGY, WITH AHLMARK
MAKING SPECIFIC PROPOSAL THAT ONE BE HELD BY 1978.
BOHMAN EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT AN OPPOSITION GOVERNMENT
COULD COMPROMISE ON MOST QUESTIONS, AND DECLARED THAT
THE MODERATES WOULD NOT BRING DOWN A NON-SOCIALIST
GOVERNMENT ON ANY ISSUE.

4. WITH MANY PEOPLE APPARENTLY EAGER TO PUT THE
QUESTION OFF UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTION, PALME SEIZED
THE OPPORTUNITY TO GET OUT FROM UNDER THE NUCLEAR
SHADOW AND PUT SOME PRESSURE ON THE OPPOSITION.
REVERSING HIS PREVIOUS STAND, HE DECLARED THAT IF THE
OPPOSITION PARTIES WERE ABLE TO AGREE BEFORE THE
ELECTION TO HOLD A REFERENDUM THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS
WOULD GO ALONG, DESPITE HIS OPPOSITION IN PRINCIPLE.
HE URGED THEM TO MAKE A DECISION BEFORE THE ELECTION,
AND CHARGED THE OPPOSITION WITH USING THE REFERENDUM
IDEA TO "FLEE FROM THEIR OWN HELPLESS DISSENSION."

5. IN REPLY TO THIS MANEUVERING, FALLDIN ANNOUNCED
THAT IT IS "ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE" TO REMOVE THE NUCLEAR
DEBATE FROM THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN BY SAYING THE MATTER
CAN BE DECIDED LATER BY REFERENDUM. HE DEMANDED THAT
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THE POLITICAL PARTIES TAKE "A DEFINITE STAND ON THIS
VITAL ISSUE" BEFORE THE ELECTION.

6. ANOTHER ISSUE, POTENTIALLY DAMAGING TO THE SOCIAL
DEMOCRATS, AROSE WITH PRESS PREPORTS THAT THE GOVERNMENT
IS PREPARING DRAFT LEGISLATION WHICH WOULD DE FACTO
REMOVE THE INDIVIDUAL'S RIGHT TO BUILD OR MODIFY PRIVATE
CONSTRUCTION. PRESS ACCOUNTS STATED THAT TRADE CIRCLES

DESCRIBE THE DRAFT LEGISLATION AS "GOING EVEN FARTHER THAN THE LO'S (SWEDISH CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS) DEMAND FOR NATIONALIZATION OF LAND." THE MINISTER OF HOUSING, QUICKLY DENIED THAT A DRAFT WITH THAT INTENT WAS BEING PREPARED, THOUGH A MODERATE MEMBER OF THE DRAFT WORKING GROUP DESCRIBED THE MINISTER'S DENIAL AS "STRETCHING THE TRUTH TO UNRECOGNIZABILITY."

7. COMMENT: WITHIN THE ONGOING GENERAL DEBATE ON GOVERNMENT CONTROL AND INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM, THE QUESTION OF NUCLEAR POWER HAS BECOME THE DOMINANT CONCRETE ISSUE IN THE FINAL STAGE OF THE CAMPAIGN. THOUGH THE OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE UNDOUBTEDLY TRYING TO COORDINATE, AND THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS WOULD LIKE TO AVOID THE ISSUE, THE DISPUTE OVER HOW TO RESOLVE THE NUCLEAR QUESTION IS UNLIKELY TO BE SETTLED BEFORE THE ELECTION. IN ANY EVENT, FALLDIN'S SUCCESS IN PRESSING HIS CASE MAY PROVE TO BE THE UNDOING OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES AS HE PERSISTS IN HIGHLIGHTING THE DIVISIONS AMONG THE NON-SOCIALISTS AND ALLOWS PALME TO CONTINUE HIS ATTACKS ON THE INABILITY OF THE OPPOSITION TO AGREE ON A COMMON PROGRAM FOR EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT.
SMITH

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